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SUBJECT: NIGERIA'S NOMINEE FOR THE 2009 SECRETARY'S AWARD
FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE

REF: STATE 99729

11. (U) Mission Nigeria is pleased to nominate Mrs. Josephine Effah-Chukwuma as its nominee for the 2009 Secretary's Award for International Women of Courage. Her biographical details and nomination justification follow.

12. NOMINEE'S BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:

FULL LEGAL NAME: Josephine Effah-Chukwuma
JOB TITLE/ASSOCIATION: Executive Director, Project Alert On Violence Against Women
DATE OF BIRTH: September 29, 1966
COUNTRY OF BIRTH: Nigeria
CITIZENSHIP: Nigeria
ADDRESS: 26, Bamenda Street, Wuse Zone 3, FCT, Abuja, Nigeria
TELEPHONE: 234-9-8708618 or 234-805-200-4698
EMAIL: josephine@projectalertnig.org
PASSPORT NUMBER: A3805198A

13. (U) NOMINATION JUSTIFICATION:

The courage and perseverance that Mrs. Josephine Effah-Chukwuma has demonstrated in her decade long quest to end violence against women deserves recognition, and Mission Nigeria is pleased to nominate her as our 2009 Woman of Courage. Josephine Effah-Chukwuma established the NGO Project Alert On Violence Against Women in January 1999 after identifying the need for an organization that would focus predominantly on the endemic problem of violence against women. The three main objectives of Project Alert have been: research and documentation, education and advocacy, and support services. In May 2001, Project Alert opened the first shelter in Nigeria specifically for abused women. Located in Lagos, the shelter, called Sophia's Place (named after her mother), offers temporary accommodation to an average of 50 abused women and girls a year. Other services offered at the shelter include: counseling, legal aid, skills acquisition if needed, and small "start-off" loans. As founder and Executive Director of Project Alert, Mrs. Effah-Chukwuma has initiated various outreach projects such as training and partnership programs with the police; male involvement workshops to engage and sensitize men on the gravity of violence against women; capacity building for faith-based organizations to assist women who seek counsel; HIV/AIDS awareness as it relates to sexual violence; and the "Catch Them Young" project, aimed at educating young people about physical and sexual abuse. Additionally, Mrs. Effah-Chukwuma and her organization continually advocate for policy and legal reform within Nigeria to address violence

against women.

¶4. (U) Violence against women is pervasive and often socially accepted in Nigeria, where women are customarily considered the property of the male head of household. Assessing the true extent of violence against women is difficult due to the lack of official statistics; but studies by NGOs such as Project Alert suggest the levels of violence are extremely high. Physical assault at the domestic level is the most frequent form of violence against women and it cuts across age, educational, social, religious, and cultural barriers. Federal, state, and customary laws contribute to the persistence of domestic violence, and in some cases directly condone certain forms of violence against women. Neither the federal nor state governments have offered a protective framework for victims of domestic abuse to seek assistance or refuge. Reports of spousal abuse are common; but the police rarely intervene in what is considered a domestic dispute. In more rural areas, courts and police are reluctant to intervene in abuse cases if the alleged abuse did not exceed customary norms (i.e. did not result in permanent damage, disfigurement, or life-threatening injury). Victims sometimes remain silent because of cultural or religious tradition and society teaches them to tolerate the abuse for the sake of the marriage, children or reputation of the family. The dismissive attitude of law enforcement, lack of judicial recourse, and societal tradition all compound the difficulty in combating violence against women.

¶5. (U) Despite the obstacles faced, women like Josephine Effah-Chukwuma continue to speak out and fight for the rights

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of women. Mrs. Effah-Chukwuma's endeavors greatly enhance one of Mission Nigeria's main priorities: investing in people. Promoting the work of civil society organizations such as Project Alert and addressing the welfare of Nigeria's citizens, especially women and young girls, is critical to ensuring the domestic stability and prosperous democratic future of Nigeria.

¶6. (U) Mrs. Josephine Effah-Chukwuma was notified of her nomination as Mission Nigeria's Woman of Courage and expressed extreme gratitude for such a great honor. The nominee stated that she would be willing to travel to Washington if selected as one of the finalists and would humbly accept the award.

¶7. (U) Please contact Political Officer Nyree Tripptree at tripptreea@state.gov for additional information.

¶8. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos. Sanders